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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000545

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)  
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: OFFICIAL SUPPORT FOR RETURNS IN  
FERIZAJ/UROSEVAC

REF: A. PRISTINA 502  
[1](#)B. PRISTINA 404

Classified By: Chief of Mission Tina Kaidanow for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. A broad spectrum of participants, including the municipal mayor, numerous internationals, and a large group of Serb IDP association leaders, took part in a discussion of the returns process at a conference held July 2 in Ferizaj/Urosevac municipality. Highlighting the recent successful return of 82 Serbs to Srpski Babush (ref a), the forum's main purpose was to seek funding for additional projects. Serb attendees expressed willingness to come back to Kosovo despite the difficulties involved, a sentiment welcomed by their Albanian neighbors. END SUMMARY.

#### LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ferizaj/Urosevac mayor Faik Grainca chaired the conference and repeatedly emphasized the willingness of his municipal government to support returns. Having personally greeted the Srpski Babush returnees June 23, the mayor pointed to other concrete examples of his government's willingness to facilitate the process, most notably scarce municipal funds spent improving infrastructure in Serb areas. However, Grainca's key point for outside observers was that beyond physical improvements, Ferizaj/Urosevac has developed an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance towards Serb returnees, and he credited the local media in particular for fostering a peaceful environment. OSCE and UNDP representatives told poloff that Grainca has truly embraced the returns process, demonstrating his commitment to it upon many occasions, making after-hours phone calls to officials to solve problems for returnees, meeting frequently with IDP association leaders, and taking the extra steps to make the process work.

#### SERBS SHOW WILLINGNESS

[1](#)3. (SBU) For their part, Serb IDP and returnee participants

showed willingness to work with the municipality and find donors willing to fund proposed projects. In all, IDP association leaders from seven villages (along with three leaders from returnee communities) voiced their readiness to come back. Several Albanian village officials sat next to their Serb neighbors and discussed efforts to help plan and prepare for organized returns. Just as in Srpski Babush (ref a), poloff heard Serbs (and this time, Albanians) emphasize that they were happy to live in multi-ethnic villages with their neighbors. Several participants pointed out that the municipality was not as affected by the conflict in the late 1990s as other areas in Kosovo; as a result, relations among communities are relatively better than in other parts of Kosovo.

#### LACK OF MONEY THE CHIEF PROBLEM, OTHER DIFFICULTIES

¶4. (SBU) Funding for returns in Kosovo has been generally limited, and Grainca expressed frustration that his municipality has expended scarce funds from its municipal budget to facilitate returns without, in his opinion, significant contributions from outside donors or the Ministry of Communities and Returns. His observation led to chorus of agreement from the gathered Serb IDP association members. Additionally, many Serbs noted that income generation projects and other start-up help for new returnees were not always sufficient, but all participants generally agreed that these were problems that could be dealt with, not fatal impediments to overall success. (Note: Returns Minister Grbic, a Serb, was invited to attend the meeting, but did not, sending a lower-ranking official instead. End Note.)

#### HEAVY PRESSURE ON RETURNEES

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¶5. (C) Discussions with conference participants illustrate some of the pressures on Serb returnees. Osman Cokli, Albanian village leader from Babljak, said his Serb returnee neighbors told him they had been told by Belgrade-associated officials to avoid giving any positive impression to the media about their lives in Kosovo. He added that they feared confiscation of official documents (such as passports), losing pensions, salaries, and health benefits, and that some had even been told they were "Albanian spies" for working closely with him. OSCE and UNDP officials told poloff a bizarre story involving a Serb-speaking woman claiming to be a German reporter who appeared in Babljak spreading fear among Serbs with "doomsday" scenarios involving mass deportations of Serbs by a newly-independent Kosovo-Albanian government. The village leader told poloff he was able to work with the village council to head off any adverse effects; nonetheless, he remains fearful of what other threats might emerge. OSCE officials said that this "reporter" tried to slip money to several villagers in a pathetic attempt to cover up her visit.

¶6. (C) MNTF-E Commander, US BG Earhart told us that Kosovo Serbs in his AOR have been threatened with a cutoff of pensions and salaries if they cooperate with KFOR. General Earhart also raised this issue over dinner with visiting A/S Fried.

#### COMMENT

¶7. (C) Ferizaj/Urosevac is the only municipality in Kosovo to host any such kind of returns conference, and its mayor has been supportive of the returns process. Serb willingness to return to these areas is apparently high despite countervailing pressures and the fact that any Serbs living in the municipality would be a small minority of its population, since Ferizaj is not part of one of the new Serb-majority municipalities envisioned under the Ahtisaari proposal. Despite some problems with large-scale organized returns in other municipalities (ref b), Ferizaj/Urosevac officials believe that organized returns can work there, and

members of the international community agree. To the greatest extent possible, we will support the mayor in his efforts. Reports of Serbs being threatened by Belgrade -- which purports to represent their interests -- are both credible and disturbing.

KAIDANOW